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We can’t let industry impede or weaken plastics treaty

. by David Suzuki July 30, 2025July 30, 2025

Plastic comes with as many problems as the oil and gas it’s manufactured from.

Plastic waste on a beach. Credit: Bo Eide / Flickr Credit: Bo Eide / Flickr

Plastic has only been in widespread use for about 75 years. Now it’s everywhere, from the highest mountaintops to the deepest ocean, from the Arctic to Antarctic. In swirling ocean patches, in the air and soil, in our food and drink — even in our bodies — plastic in its many forms, including tiny micro- and nanoplastics, has altered our planet and our lives.

Governments are meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, from August 5 to 14 for final negotiations on a global, legally binding **treaty to address plastic pollution**, including in the marine environment. The “comprehensive” treaty would address “the full life cycle of plastic, including its production, design, and disposal.”

Negotiations **were to have been completed in December** in South Korea, but **pressure from the fossil fuel and chemical industries** and fuel-producing countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and China, stalled progress.

Almost all **plastic is made from oil and gas** — much of it now a **product of the fracked gas industry**. As the world shifts away from polluting, climate-altering fossil fuels, industry is plotting other ways to keep reaping obscene profits. Pushing plastic is high on the

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But plastic comes with as many problems as the oil and gas it's manufactured from. And, as with the impacts of burning fossil fuels, plastic pollution disproportionately affects vulnerable and marginalized people and communities.

One issue is that wealthy countries export much of their waste to poorer countries with lax or non-existent environmental regulations and inadequate waste management systems — known as "**waste colonialism**." Exported plastics are supposed to be recycled, but they're often burned or dumped. Some countries, including China — which once took almost half the world's plastic waste — have banned imports. Now more flows to other, smaller countries.

As nations scramble to find places to send their waste, people keep producing more. According to the **Global Plastic Action Partnership**, the world creates 460 million tonnes a year (up from two million tonnes in 1950), of which only nine per cent gets recycled. Without intervention, that could triple by 2060, costing hundreds of trillions of dollars, polluting air, water and land and killing numerous plants and animals, including us. At this rate, **plastic in the ocean will outweigh the fish** by 2050.

Plastics are convenient — lightweight, strong yet flexible, corrosion-resistant and waterproof. They can be moulded into any shape and made clear or any colour. But as with many things in our hyper-consumer societies, we produce and use way too much. When I was growing up, no one used plastic bags, packaging or straws. More than half the plastic ever made has been **produced since 2000**. Plastic is now **showing up in human brains**, livers, kidneys, joints, reproductive organs, bones and blood.

This treaty is necessary and must incorporate "**circular economy**" principles into dealing with plastic pollution. But we have to push back against fossil fuel and chemical industry influence. Under that pressure, references to human rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that appeared in previous drafts were removed from the December version — even though Indigenous communities are disproportionately exposed to the significant and systemic toxic harms of global plastics production and pollution.

To be effective, the treaty must recognize Indigenous rights and the role of Indigenous knowledge in treaty implementation. It should also take a human rights–based approach that promotes environmental justice, prevents **environmental racism** and recognizes the right to a healthy environment.

Plastic production should be capped globally and non-essential single-use plastic products banned. Chemicals of concern in plastics and/or used to manufacture them should be prohibited or restricted.

We also need to use all existing international legal instruments — including the **Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions** on hazardous chemicals and wastes (especially the Basel ban and plastics amendments); **Paris Agreement** fossil fuel phase-out objectives and subsidies commitments; and plastic pollution objectives under the **Global Biodiversity Framework**.

A **"high ambition" coalition** of 70 jurisdictions, including Canada, the European Union, Australia and the United Kingdom, has committed to take "urgent action and effective interventions along the full lifecycle of plastics" to end plastic pollution by 2040.

We can't let industry dilute or obstruct this life-saving agreement.

*David Suzuki is a scientist, broadcaster, author and co-founder of the David Suzuki Foundation. Written with David Suzuki Foundation Senior Writer and Editor Ian Hanington. Learn more at **davidsuzuki.org**.*

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Mikey
a month ago

Suzuki is correct.

However, despite the fact that "Governments are meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, from August 5 to 14 for final negotiations on a global, legally binding treaty to address plastic pollution,....", **we already know the outcome will be planned failure.** This is true because the industry cannot afford to pay for its actual costs which are deceptively downloaded to individuals, governments and the environment.

How do we know this? Because our political economics is captured by industries that profit from a privileged socialism reserved for its wealthy owners. (Socialism for the public is communism, a dangerous extremism conservatives insist!)

How did industry attain this privilege? Via lobbying and donations to political parties and third party organizations which indoctrinate society to ignore and accept propaganda that citizens pay dearly for. Our political parties remain insulated from public control and accountability and perform their authoritarian negligence and extremism as they will. Frackers and the oil industry writ large love it!

This neoliberal organized crime has undermined the possibilities of democracy while petro-fascists like Smith and others misleadingly insist the burgeoning oil industry is being strangled by Laurentian elites! lol Petroleum interests dominate both Canada's and the world's politics while complaining about undue government interference and 'unacceptable' regulations *they help governments' write!* **Collusion, public manipulation and fraud.**

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Super Yeti → Mikey
a month ago

I do recycle plastic, but I wonder what happens to it when I read that the plastics industry does not have the capacity to recycle all but a small percentage of it. I don't exactly want to clean it for a bin that ships it to a developing country as it falls off a ship into the ocean on the way there. I think a Michael Moore level visibility documentary on this would turn the public from our current fatalistic powerlessness.
The greed is just shocking. To think the most minimal changes done by Justin Trudeau would be fought against like video game battle warriors and hench-spokespeople like Danielle Smith, Pierre Poilievre, and FOX TV hosts is just shameful. I think there was some idiotic commentary about plastic straws being masculine.. God help us.

2 0

How True → Super Yeti
a month ago

Interesting isn't it, even when we try to do good, how conflicted the path is before us, whether recycling plastic or seeking a better democracy?

Concerning the latter, and your oft repeated hope for PR, Monday's BRC by election results will be interesting to see how they will differentiate between reality and all the hype. Most reports will only focus on the difference in votes received by each of the candidates. However much more importantly to key factors likely missing that I will be watching for will be, first of all turn out, but then even more importantly what percentage of the total voters actually turned out for each of the candidates. These overlooked facts until a bigger story than just hearing who actually was elected and whether with the majority are not.

On the bigger picture, the federal NDP is gearing up for a leadership convention and rabble finally reported that Ives Engler will be challenging the party elites insider. Later on I'll be posting some key further information and invite your participation at A quarrel among the wolves - (rabble)
rabble(dot)ca/columnists/a-quarrel-among-the-wolves/

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Mikey → Super Yeti
a month ago

I hear you about the recycling conundrum for individuals like us..... the problem appears structural, that is, intentionally produce a systemic waste, some toxic, some not but still dangerously polluting. So much waste is intentionally produced that it cannot be dealt with properly. The waste is thereby not dealt with and the structurally created problem

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economic right to pollute and terrify. Thinking of oil as waste garbage for distribution over the face of the planet is promoted and protected. Challenging this is labelled extremism lol! Challenging this means you are not a Canadian to the real extremists amongst us!

To end the manufacturing of plastics that are not recycled or won't be recycled is the beginning of a solution. To end the use of toxics in plastics (and other products) is a no brainer that highlights the political collusion in enabling a toxic economics to rule as rational and, wait for it..... as truly profitable! Yikes.

Structural problems require structural reforms, and just like the democracy we cannot seem to create, the structures that would create democracy are the same structures that could bring a democratic economics into power that would turn the insane plastics economy a full 180 degrees. Bringing accountability into an unaccountable world ruled by wealth, profits and a distorted commodification of human and planetary life requires structural, systemic changes in the indoctrinated thinking which reliably produces failure, perpetuates secrecy, and protects impunity under absurd legal doctrines fit for aristocrats and the kings of the past.

Job #1 - stay sane as we continue to push for the end of normalized insanity.

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